

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY TUNIS

UNCLAS STATE 093076

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SHUM, TS

SUBJECT: MESTIRI LETTER IN NEW YORK TIMES

FYI: FOLLOWING APPEARED IN APRIL 8 "LETTER TO THE EDITOR"
SECTION NEW YORK TIMES.
BEGIN TEXT:
QUOTE:

TO THE EDITOR: I FEAR THAT A RECENT LETTER FROM THE
TUNISIAN AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON MAY MISLEAD YOUR READERS.
THE GENERAL STRIKE OF JANUARY 26, WHICH LED TO THE DEATH OF
100 TUNISIANS, WAS CALLED TO PROTEST ATTACKS AGAINST TRADE
UNIONISTS AND THEIR HEADQUARTERS. RIOTS BROKE OUT AS UN-
KNOWN INFILTRATORS TRANSFORMED CROWDS INTO MOBS. SINCE
WE DON'T KNOW WHO THESE INFILTRATORS WERE, WE HAVE CALLED
FOR AN IMPARTIAL INQUIRY COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE THE
SOURCES OF PROVOCATION.

ALTHOUGH THE AMBASSADOR LAUDED PRESS LIBERTY IN TUNISIA,
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IT TOOK OVER A YEAR FOR OUR MOVEMENT OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATS
TO RECEIVE PERMISSION TO PUBLISH OUR NEWSPAPER. SINCE
JANUARY 26 THE PRESS HAS BEEN CENSORED OR CONTROLLED. THE
LABOR UNION PAPER, ONCE FREE, GETS ITS ORDERS FROM A RUMP
UNION LEADERSHIP WHILE THE REAL UNION LEADERS ARE IN
PRISON.
EVEN THOUGH OVERALL TUNISIAN GROWTH RATES HAVE BEEN HIGH,

GROWTH HAS BEEN LOPSIDED. INTERNATIONAL BANKING SOURCES CLAIM THAT BETWEEN 1966 AND 1975 INCOME DISTRIBUTION IN TUNISIA SHOWED NO IMPROVEMENT; THE ECONOMIC GAP BETWEEN THE URBAN POPULATION AND THE PEASANTRY, IN FACT, WIDENED. IN 1976 4.6 PERCENT OF TUNISIAN FARMERS OWNED 46.6 PERCENT OF THE ARABLE LAND, REPRESENTING AN EXTREMELY SKEWED LAND DISTRIBUTION. IN THE NONAGRICULTURAL SECTORS, 1976 UNEMPLOYMENT REACHED THE RATE OF 22 PERCENT (OR 265,000 PEOPLE); 54 PERCENT OF THEM (OR 143,000) WERE YOUTHS SEEKING FIRST JOBS. PROGNOSTICS INDICATE THAT BY 1981 URBAN UNEMPLOYMENT WILL RISE TO 27 PERCENT. WILL THIS GENERATE FURTHER SOCIAL UPHEAVAL?

I AGREE WITH THE AMBASSADOR. TUNISIA IS A CIVILIZED COUNTRY WITH A MATURE POPULATION. ANY AMERICAN TOURIST COMING TO TUNISIA HAS FELT THE WARMTH OF OUR HOSPITALITY. UNFORTUNATELY, THE PRESENT POLITICAL REGIME DOES NOT REFLECT THE DEGREE OF TUNISIA'S SOCIAL EVOLUTION IN RECENT YEARS. AHMED MESTIRI, NEW YORK, MARCH 27, 1978.

THE WRITER IS A FORMER MINISTER OF DEFENSE, INTERIOR AND JUSTICE OF TUNISIA. END TEXT. UNQUOTE. VANCE

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